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Papers Committee changes procedures

by Sam Cox

The Board of Governors has approved new operating procedures for the Committee on Papers. They are effective immediately, although some papers currently under review will be processed under the old procedures. The new procedures for reviewing and selecting papers for the *Transactions of the Society of Actuaries* will appear in revisions of the *Reviewers' Manual* and the *Authors' Manual*.

The goal of the new procedures is to improve the quality of the papers published in the *Transactions*. Authors will be encouraged to write for the *Transactions*, reviews will be more complete, and decisions on publishing papers will be reached more quickly. These procedures also will formalize the Society's intent to actively seek good papers, rather than merely reviewing papers as they are submitted.

New roles

Under the new procedure, the chair of the Committee on Papers serves in a role similar to that of an editor for other academic journals. The chair is responsible for selecting papers for publication from those submitted and for encouraging authors to submit their papers.

The chair's new role encompasses more responsibility and is now a Board of Governors appointed position for a two-year term. That term could be renewed one time, subject to Board approval, for another two years.

The chair also is responsible for recruiting and training associate editors and for recruiting additional reviewers, both members and non-members, as needed. The chair also is responsible for encouraging or inviting authors to write for the *Transactions* by contacting Society Sections, monitoring Section newsletters and presentations from seminars and meetings, and contacting potential authors directly and inviting them to submit a paper.

The vice chairs of the Committee on Papers now serve as associate editors of the *Transactions*, and each is assigned a subject area. Currently, these assignments are:

- Esther Portnoy — Mathematics and Statistics
- Bud Friedstat — Financial Reporting
- Elias Shiu — Finance
- Chuck Fuhrer — Health
- Bryn Douds — Life Insurance Products
- Marc Twinney — Pension

Reviewers, now called referees, will continue to review papers, but they will recommend, rather than vote on, whether a paper should be published. The chair, based on these recommendations, will decide on the publication of a paper.

Procedures

As a paper is submitted, the chair assigns it to a vice chair/associate editor, based on its subject. The associate editor then selects three individuals to write referees' reports, or reviews, on the submitted paper. The referees will be selected for their knowledge of the material. If necessary, the referees can be selected from outside the Committee on Papers and the Society of Actuaries.

The referees' responsibility will differ from the work reviewers perform now. For example, instead of making a decision and voting on a paper's acceptance, the referees will make independent recommendations regarding the publication of a paper. Their reports will be submitted to the associate editor assigned to the paper. The associate editor will recommend to the chair whether the paper is acceptable, acceptable with either minor or major revision, or rejected for publication. The decision categories and the criteria used to support them are the same as outlined in the *Authors' Manual* and *Reviewers' Manual*. The chair then will make the decision on the paper by

attempting to build a consensus based on the referees' recommendations. Once a decision has been made on a paper, the associate editor will prepare a cover letter to convey the publication decision to the author.

An exception to the chair's authority on the publication of a paper would be in the rare case when the chair disagrees with the majority of the referees' reports. In such a case, the chair would notify the director of publications, who would decide the issue. The director of publications may ask for additional reviews of a paper or simply direct the chair regarding its publication. The author would not be involved at this point.

The appeals process for authors who disagree with the decision to reject their paper would not change. Authors currently can appeal a decision to the vice president in charge of publications. These procedures, as outlined in the current *Authors' Manual*, would be followed.

The duties regarding the judging of the Annual and Triennial Prizes have not changed. The Committee on Papers retains the responsibility for selecting these prize winners.

Result of new procedures

These new procedures will allow more flexibility in reviewing papers. Because referees can be selected from outside the profession, the Committee on Papers will be able to handle papers in subject areas where only a few Society members are expert. In addition, the image of the profession will be enhanced by exposing individuals from other disciplines to the work of actuaries. Finally, the new procedures will allow the committee to serve the profession better by improving both the number and quality of papers published in the *Transactions*.

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